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January 8, 1975
No. 0491/75

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

LATIN AMERICAN TRENDS

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Western Hemisphere Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS

January 8, 1975

NR

Argentina: Looking Far Ahead? 4

NR

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

NR
Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

NR
Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

3.5(c)

Argentina: Looking Far Ahead?

"President Maria Estela de Peron will not seek reelection in 1977." This announcement last week, by a high government official, was calculated to divert public attention from Argentina's deepening economic problems toward elections that are still more than two years away.

Such tactics are commonplace in a country where voting has long been considered the panacea for national ills. Early in this century the Radical Party rose to power on the sole platform issue of making the vote compulsory for all men over eighteen. The last military government, headed by Alejandro Lanusse, openly admitted its inability to cope with economic woes of stagnation and rampant inflation, but retained a measure of popular support by promising a return to free elections.

In reality, however, there are no likely parliamentary solutions to the major issues that divide Argentines. The internecine battles in the streets of Buenos Aires serve as a constant reminder of the incapacity of successive governments, both military and Peronist, to solve chronic political and economic difficulties. Although the combatants--terrorist and counterterrorist--are few in number, their continuing presence is the major preoccupation of this government.

Now, younger officers within the military are voicing increasing concern that the promises of the most recent election will not be fulfilled. The weekly magazine Panorama, a publication generally well informed on military matters, recently took note of this dissatisfaction. According to the respected

January 8, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

columnist Jorge Lozano, lieutenants and captains recall the overwhelming vote for change communicated in the Peronist victories of March and September 1973 and are observing that major transformations have not occurred. Lozano avoids analytical judgments, but paints instead a picture of disappointment and frustration over extremist violence and legislative inattention to social pressures. He states that there is no talk of a golpe, but notes that junior army officers, many of whom have been victims of the terrorists, are becoming highly criticial of this government. He concludes that: "no one is calling for a moralistic revolution, but it is wise to take heed of underlying shifts of sentiment. A captain is not a youth believing in Utopia. He is about 40 years old, earning a salary similar to a junior executive in a bank. He shares the intellectual preoccupations of his contemporaries, and has to support a family. Above all he is an Argentine, not a man from another planet, nor an agent from Paris or the CIA." [redacted] 3.5(c)

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January 8, 1975

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

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Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/01 C02902660